



The U.S.-India Relationship

Broad, Strategic, Diverse and Growing

By LAURINDA KEYS LONG

An interview with AMBASSADOR DAVID C. MULFORD



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In the American political system, all U.S. ambassadors, cabinet members and many other appointed officials submit their resignations just before a new president takes office, facilitating the transition to a new governmental team. Ambassador David C. Mulford submitted his resignation effective January 20, five years after he was sworn in as the United States' representative to India. Unusually, the administration of President Barack Obama has asked Ambassador Mulford to

remain in his post for some time, a reflection of the seriousness with which the new U.S. administration views the relationship with India. Meanwhile, the ambassador has been saying his farewells, including a final interview with SPAN reflecting on the five years that he and his wife, Jeannie, have spent in India.

What do India and the U.S. need to work on to continue the building of this relationship?

The area which in my five years I felt, until recently, was not developing as quickly as other areas was closer cooperation in the field of counterterrorism. One of the reasons for that is the very nature and complexity of that field, which involves sharing intelligence and possibly cooperating in joint operations. This has been slower in coming, in part I think, because of certain complicating aspects of our relationship with Pakistan, which because of traditional differences between India and Pakistan has perhaps had a dampening influence on that level of cooperation over time.

But in the last 18 months we have begun to really see some progress, and I think now, with all these recent attacks in India and especially in Mumbai, there is a very clear view of the need between us to upgrade

our level of cooperation to where we should be between two major democracies.

The presence of the FBI team in Mumbai following these attacks has been an extremely constructive experience for both sides because they made a real contribution, they have done it well and they have been appreciated. It has not been controversial in any way; it has been widely accepted as positive and I think it will lead to closer cooperation between us. This is important because India needs to substantially improve its preventive abilities. The United States has not experienced a large terrorist attack post 9/11 because, in part, of the number of things we have done to improve our preventive capacity. In working together with India we can both gain a lot from these experiences.

But there are still concerns expressed by Indians about whether the United States does enough to push Pakistan to do its part.

Well Pakistan is a sovereign nation, as is India. And the United States, post Mumbai, has been very clear, through the visits by the secretary of state and others, that we take very seriously what's happened here and we are pushing very hard with Pakistan to get to the bottom of this...and we have also maintained the same strong position in Pakistan with the Pakistanis. We must remember that there were six Americans killed in this attack and that we have a duty under our law to pursue and to get to the bottom of these kinds of outrageous acts, quite apart from the issue of cooperation with India.

What have been the main developments in the U.S.-India relationship since your arrival in 2004?

We have seen an enormous growth in the diversity of the relationship, so much so that today, among standard U.S. missions, apart from Iraq, this is now the largest. We also have something like 25 different agencies and departments of the U.S. government that are represented here, which tells you a lot about the diversity of America's interface with India.

What was the most notable accomplishment?

The civil nuclear agreement, which was regarded as sort of the cornerstone of this building relationship and which, despite many hurdles and complexities, was concluded after three-plus years of

negotiations, and has now resulted in India returning to the world of civil nuclear technology.

Are there other satisfying moments?

I was particularly happy that we were able to revise and expand the Fulbright agreement because I am very interested in education and the potential for developing educational institutions in India. To have the Indians agree to share the funding of this program equally with us, permitting the approximately doubling of the size of the program, and to have them agree to the solicitation of private resources for future expansions of a very, very premier brand, Fulbright—I'm very proud of that.

How much more cooperation in defense and military affairs have you seen?

The military and defense relationships

corrupt practices.

There has been quite a change in the process of Indians obtaining U.S. visas. How was that accomplished?

You know, our so-called visa blitz was perhaps the most satisfying thing from a public diplomacy standpoint because we had arrived at the point, in the middle of 2006, where the waiting period was 187 days for an Indian citizen to get a visa interview. We convened the leadership of the Mission and determined that we would address and fix that problem. Within the space of some months we did, by reducing the waiting period to six days everywhere in India. And the most impressive thing, perhaps, is that we have maintained the waiting period at less than 14 days most of the time and in most places in India since, with very few exceptions.

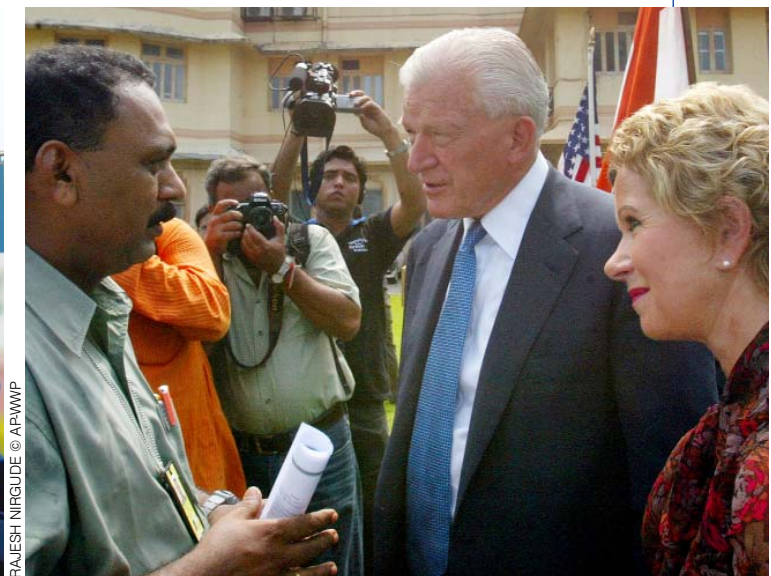
there will be, I am told, approximately 100,000 trips avoided from Hyderabad to Chennai for ordinary Indian citizens who will not have to buy an airline ticket, who will not have to spend money making a trip, staying overnight, maybe buying their lunch or whatever because they can get the process done there. That's a real service.

How does this transition process work, shifting to a new presidential administration from a different political party?

People who serve in the administration, who are political appointees, are required to resign so that the incoming administration has the privilege and ability to replace officials well down into the bureaucracy. This means that a new government can remake itself very quickly because it is able to sort of replace substantial areas of leadership in the entire administration, which permits a fresh start and new blood to come in and be effective quickly. This explains why America is so good at recasting itself and changing itself in relatively short periods of time.

Below: Ambassador Mulford with Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit at the January 5 celebration of the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Embassy building.

Below right: Ibrahim George, a survivor of the 2006 Mumbai train blasts, talks to the ambassador and his wife, Jeannie, at a commemoration ceremony in Mumbai for the victims of terror in the United States and India.



have grown dramatically, the number of joint exercises has risen sharply, we have begun to execute large defense sales. Most recently we have signed a \$2.2 billion dollar contract for a new surveillance aircraft.... India wants to diversify its supply base. It wants the top-level technologies of the world. The United States has those in its military competence, and they get totally transparent accountability in deals without any question of underhand,

We got all kinds of happy feedback from people. ...It was probably the highest public diplomacy return on anything we do in terms of customer satisfaction in India.

And there is the new U.S. consulate in Hyderabad.

This is the first full-service consulate opened by the United States, as I am told, in the last 20 years. The...previous one was in northeast China. The thing that is really impressive about opening there is that

But wouldn't Indians be concerned that such in-depth change of personnel might change the relationship and policies that affect them?

I don't think the relationship with India will move backward again as it has in the past from time to time. I think the direction and momentum is clearly established and will be maintained. I cannot think of any major issue that would provoke a major setback.